



VIRGINIA DIVISION OF MINERAL RESOURCES

MINERAL COLLECTING

Mineral collecting is an exciting and increasingly popular hobby. This brochure presents an overview of mineral collecting and provides additional information and references useful to both the beginning and experienced collectors. Mineral collecting is a relatively inexpensive hobby that can be enjoyed by the whole family. It offers the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors, get some exercise and learn about nature. Collecting trips can also be exciting, especially when there is the chance of finding minerals and gemstones of value.

GETTING STARTED

The beginning mineral collector needs two pieces of somewhat specialized equipment - a geologist's hammer and a hand lens. The hammer is used to dislodge rock or mineral specimens. It can be purchased through hardware stores, scientific supply houses, and rock shops. A hand lens, also called a pocket magnifier, is useful to identify small mineral grains and crystals. A hand lens can be purchased at a jewelry store, hobby shop, or scientific supply house. Other useful pieces of equipment include: a knapsack to carry specimens, equipment, and food; paper sacks and wrapping paper (newspaper) to wrap individual specimens; a notebook for keeping field notes; and a pocket knife. It is a good idea to mark your locality on a topographic map as accurately as possible so that you can return on future field trips or direct others to the site.

Permission must always be obtained to collect on private property.

To minimize the risk of injury, the following safety tips are strongly recommended:

1. Wear protective equipment including hard hats, steel-toed boots, and safety glasses.
2. Do not work alone; let someone else know of your location and schedule.
3. Do not enter abandoned mines or shafts.

WHERE TO LEARN ABOUT MINERALS

Mineral collecting can be much more enjoyable if you have a basic knowledge of geology and mineralogy.

Ways of obtaining information on minerals and geology are listed below:

1. Visit your state geological survey, which in Virginia is the Division of Mineral Resources. The Division of Mineral Resources (DMR) is located in Charlottesville. DMR has a sales office where reports and maps on geology and minerals and topographic maps can be purchased as well as a research library, which is open to the public. Staff geologists are available to answer questions and to identify mineral specimens. Interested citizens can download free copies of "Virginia Minerals" from DMR's web site. This publication contains articles on current geologic topics as well as reports the occurrence of rare or unusual minerals and gemstones. A current list of DMR's publications and maps can be obtained online or call (434) 951-6341.
2. The United States Geological Survey (USGS) located in Reston, Virginia, is also a good source of



Blades of kyanite from Grayson County, Virginia.

geologic information. For information, visit the USGS web site, <http://www.usgs.gov/> or call toll-free 1-888-ASK-USGS (1-888-275-8747).

3. Books on rocks and minerals are available in most book stores. Public and university libraries are also good sources of reading material. A good reference to the geology of the Commonwealth is "Geology and Virginia" (Dietrich, 1990a) and the most comprehensive references to minerals of Virginia are Dietrich (1990b, 1993). These books by Dietrich are available only in DMR's sales office.

4. Take a basic course in geology or mineralogy at a university or community college. A general knowledge of geology and mineralogy will make one's hobby more enjoyable and meaningful. Also, universities may have displays of local rocks, fossils, and minerals, which are open to the public.

5. Join a local mineral club if there is one in your area. These clubs offer educational programs and organized collecting trips. Many clubs have their own liability insurance, which makes it possible for club members to obtain permission to visit quarries, whereas an individual collector could not. Clubs may put on shows and swap meets that are educational and offer the opportunity to upgrade a mineral collection.

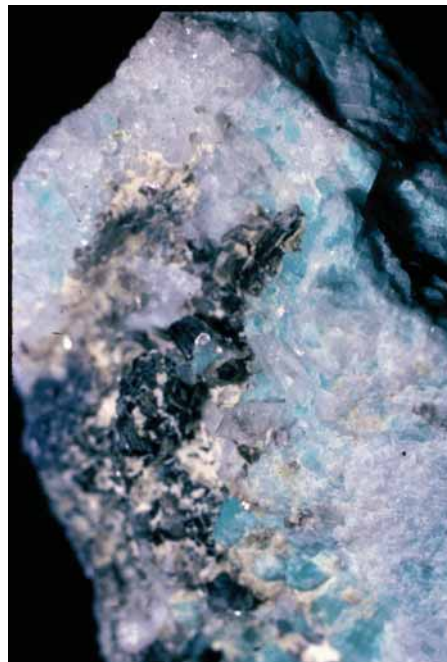


Sphalerite within a quartz crystal from Bath County, Virginia.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR MINERALS

Minerals can be collected at commercial collecting areas. In addition to the commercial collecting areas, good places to look for mineral specimens are active

and abandoned mines and quarries, mine dumps, highway cuts, excavations for construction sites, and stream beds and banks. Also, specimens have been found in plowed fields, especially after a rain. It is suggested that the beginning collector might accompany an experienced collector on a first collecting trip, as it may be difficult to know what



Amazonite, cleavelandite mica and quartz from Amelia County, Virginia.

one is looking for without guidance. Always obtain permission of the landowner before entering a property to collect minerals. Entering private property without permission is considered trespassing.

COLLECTING IN VIRGINIA

Virginia has many famous and unique mineral occurrences. The Commonwealth contains a great variety of minerals with over 425 individual species being reported. Over the years Virginia localities have produced fine specimens of allanite, andalusite, apophyllite, beryl, calcite, cassiterite, kyanite, microcline (variety amazonite), prehnite, pyrite, spessartine, staurolite, topaz, turquoise, and vivianite. With diligence and a little luck, rare and unusual minerals can still be found in Virginia.

Federal Lands

1. National Parks - No collecting of any kind (except with a special research permit)

IDENTIFYING MINERALS

Many minerals can be easily identified by their physical properties such as color, luster, hardness, and density. Hardness is a physical property that is determined by observing whether one mineral can scratch another. To test a mineral's relative hardness, geologists and mineral enthusiasts use Moh's relative hardness scale. Moh's relative hardness scale ranges from 1 to 10, with ten being the hardest. Each number has a mineral assigned to it.



- 1-talc
- 2-gypsum
- 3-calcite
- 4-fluorite
- 5-apatite
- 6-feldspar
- 7-quartz
- 8-topaz
- 9-corundum
- 10-diamond

It can be helpful to know that your fingernail has a hardness of 2.5; a penny, 3; a knife blade, 5.5; and a steel file, 6.5. Use these examples to scratch a sample to get an approximate hardness. Other tests for identifying minerals include: specific gravity (weight of mineral compared to the weight of an equal volume of water), optical properties, crystal form, color, and luster. Minerals differ in other properties such as cleavage, fracture, parting planes, and the distinctive color of its streak on a piece of unglazed porcelain. Some minerals are magnetic, some have electrical properties, some glow under ultraviolet or black light, some are radioactive, and some fuse under a low flame while others are unaffected. Chemical or X-ray analyses generally can identify a mineral. Many tests too complicated for the beginner or require special equipment are also available.

A novice collector should read about minerals, look at photographs and samples, and talk with experienced mineral collectors in order to gain experience in identifying minerals. Also, geologists trained in mineralogy and petrology are available to assist mineral collectors in identifying minerals and rocks.

2. National Forests - Permission or permit required.
George Washington & Jefferson National Forests
5162 Valleypointe Parkway
Roanoke, Virginia 24019
<http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/gwj/>
(540) 265-5100

State Lands

3. State Forests and Parks - Written permission required.
Virginia Department of Forestry
900 Natural Resources Drive
Charlottesville, Virginia 22903
<http://www.dof.virginia.gov>
(434) 977-6555

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

203 Governor Street, Suite 213
Richmond, Virginia 23219
<http://www.dcr.virginia.gov>
1-800-933-PARK

4. Collecting along public roads (except Interstate highways where collecting is forbidden) - Allowed as long as a hazard is not created and the flow of traffic is not impeded.

Virginia Department of Transportation
1401 East Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219
<http://www.virginiadot.org>

Private Lands

5. Private property - Allowed only with permission of the land owner.

SUGGESTED READING

- Dietrich, R. V., 1990a, Geology and Virginia: Virginia Division of Mineral Resources, 213 p.
- _____, 1990b, Minerals of Virginia, 1990: Virginia Division of Mineral Resources, 474 p.
- _____, 1993, Minerals of Virginia 1990 - An Update: Division of Mineral Resources, 28 p.
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- Mitchell, R. S., Giannini, W. F., and Penick, D. A., 1992, Large andalusite crystals from Campbell County. Virginia: Virginia Minerals, V. 38, n. 1, p. 1-8.
- Mitchell, R. S., and Giannini, W. F., 1988, Minerals of Albermarle County, Virginia: Virginia Division of Mineral Resource Publication 89, 19 p.
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- _____, 1987, Pyrite and other minerals from Barger's Quarry near Lexington, Virginia: Virginia Minerals, v. 33, n 2, p. 13-17.
- _____, 1994, Minerals of Rockbridge County, Virginia: Virginia Minerals, v. 40, nos. 1 and 2, p. 1-13.
- Penick, D. A., Sweet, P. C., 1992, Mineral collecting localities in Virginia: Virginia Minerals, v. 38, n. 2, p. 9-12
- Sweet, P. C., 1980, Gold in Virginia, Virginia Mineral Resources Publication 19, 77 p.
- Sweet, P. C., and Penick, D. A., 1986, Moorfield pegmatite mine reopens - Virginia's only active underground gem mine: Virginia Minerals, v. 32, n. 2, p. 13-18.
- Prepared by D. Allen Penick; revised 04/2007.

Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy

Division of Mineral Resources

900 Natural Resources Drive, Suite 500

Charlottesville, VA 22903

Sales Office: (434) 951-6341 FAX : (434) 951-6365

Sales Hours: 8:00 AM - 4:30 PM Mon. - Fri.

Geologic Information: (434) 951-6342

<http://www.dmme.virginia.gov/divisionmineralresources.shtml>